

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

## DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Faculty Publications, Department of History

History, Department of

---

Spring 2001

### Review of Elizabeth Ewan and Maureen M. Meikle, eds., *Women in Scotland c. 1100-c. 1750*

Carole Levin

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, [clevin2@unl.edu](mailto:clevin2@unl.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historyfacpub>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

Levin, Carole, "Review of Elizabeth Ewan and Maureen M. Meikle, eds., *Women in Scotland c. 1100-c. 1750*" (2001). *Faculty Publications, Department of History*. 66.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historyfacpub/66>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications, Department of History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

172 *Albion*

well established by 1979, a point Greenwood's publishers seemingly miss in featuring a cover photo of the Iron Lady and Mikhail Gorbachev. The author recognizes that Thatcher's ideological influence upon President Reagan contributed a certain semblance of Britain's serving as intermediary between East and West, given her working relationship with Gorbachev. Yet her measurable influence was at best situational. When the Cold War moved into end-play, with a reunited Germany looming as the leader of a federal Europe, Britain's role again became "peripheral" (p. 189). Greenwood's work is much informed by his own archival work, and he is fortunate that official documents are available for all but the long-term denouement of the Cold War. Yet there remains work to be done with the latter decades as well, particularly related to the question of the future of "Britain in Europe." Not least among the outcomes of the way in which the Cold War was fought, Britain's choice of a seemingly high profile in a decidedly junior partnership with the United States compromised her European role. Though other factors also were involved in Britain's Atlanticist priorities, the Cold War clearly kept Britain at a distance from the emerging councils of later twentieth-century Europe. The consequences are today altogether evident in the European Union and in Tony Blair's "New Britain."

*State University of New York, Buffalo*

JOHN F. NAYLOR

Elizabeth Ewan and Maureen M. Meikle, eds. *Women in Scotland c. 1100–c. 1750*. East Linton, Scotland: Tuckwell Press. 1999. Pp. xxx, 272. £14.99. ISBN 1-86232-046-2.

One of the most famous women in history was a Scotswoman, Mary Stuart. But the rest of women in Scottish history have long been ignored. Elizabeth Ewan and Maureen Meikle have put together an impressive collection that addresses women in Scotland in the medieval and early modern period. The editors argue persuasively that it is important to know about Scotswomen from all social levels. The book includes a very useful time line and introductory bibliographical essay. The twenty essays in the collection are arranged under the themes of religion, literature, legal history, the economy, politics, and the family. Religion played an important role for women in Scotland. Not a lot information has been published on Scottish nunneries. R. Andrew McDonald's essay on the foundation and patronage of nunneries in twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Scotland concentrates on one particular aspect: their foundation and patronage by members of the Scottish elite. Especially strong is Audrey-Beth Fitch's essay, "Power Through Purity: The Virgin Martyrs and Women's Salvation in Pre-Reformation Scotland," which discusses beliefs about women's nature and the stories of virgin saints such as Katherine of Alexandria and Margaret of Antioch—how the torture depicted and the courage of the saints were examples for women who were perceived as preoccupied with the body and the sexuality. Though Fitch does not remark specifically on it, these two saints were also the saints whose voices Joan of Arc heard. There are strong connections between late medieval Scotland and France and Fitch's essay adds further evidence of the links. The theme of expectations about women's moral characters and religious experience is continued in David Mullan's fine essay on women in Scottish divinity, which again shows links with France by demonstrating the connections between a Scottish manuscript and the work of Christine de Pizan. Evelyn S. Newlyn discusses representations of women in literature that also show religious values; she argues there is a narrow role for women in literature as either stereotype or icon, lustful or virtuous.

Though the editors wanted to avoid too great an emphasis on royal and aristocratic women, a number of essays address these women. Andrea Thompson writes about the women at the court of James V and Ruth Grant about women in the reign of James VI. Maureen Meikle's essay on Anna of Denmark and Court finances explores not only Anna's extravagance but also how dutiful she was to her husband James. Karl von den Steinen writes about the activism of early eighteenth-century aristocratic women. Priscilla Bawcutt and Bridget Henish's essay on James II's daughters and their foreign marriages argue for the importance of Princesses Margaret, Isabella, and Eleanor, particularly for their literary activity. Margaret, the wife of the French Dauphin, the future Louis XI, apparently wrote a great deal; unfortunately Louis, who hated his wife during the nine years of their marriage, had all her papers destroyed after her death in 1445. Isabella's husband, Francis, duke of Brittany, died after only seven years of matrimony. In her forty-five years of widowhood, Isabella was a book collector. Eleanor married Sigmund, archduke of Tyrol, and served as his regent when he was away. She shared with her husband a love of books, and was literate in German, Latin, French, and Scots.

Using their songs as sources, Anne Frater discusses Gaelic-speaking Highland women in the early modern period; she argues that their story is one not only of subjugation but also of rebellion. This is a particularly impressive essay that demonstrates the agency and feelings of these women; their songs give these women a unique voice that carries over the centuries. Domhnall Uilleam Stiubhart's essay on women in the Gaelic highlands continues some of Frater's themes. Scottish women were involved in a variety of economic activities. Ale was an important part of the Scottish diet and so brewers were critical though it did not confer high status. Elizabeth Ewan's essay, based on medieval town court records, on women brewers in late medieval towns is another particularly strong essay. Alastair Mann's explores the role of women in the book trade in early modern Scotland and Helen Dingwall discusses women's role in the economy in late seventeenth-century Edinburgh, finding that some women, both married and widowed, were able to function at a fairly high economic level. On another economic level, Gordon DesBrisay discusses unmarried women who were wet-nurses.

The essays on Scottish women and the law, by John Finlay, Winifred Coutts, and Michael Graham, are some of the strongest in the collection. These essays discuss women's agency in the secular and church courts as well as what we can learn about women's status from testaments and marriage contracts. These scholars found that some women in these records had much more power than is traditionally believed. Women's roles in the family are explored in the essays by Roxanne Reddington-Wilde, who discusses birth order and social status, and Ian D. Whyte and Kathleen A. Whyte, with a fine essay on the wives of Scottish ministers from the mid-sixteenth to the end of the seventeenth centuries.

Ewen and Meikle have put together a collection of strong essays, a number of which demonstrate both the connections between Scottish women's experience with those in England and the continent as well as what was unique for the Scottish experience. The essays suggest a number of directions for scholars to explore in the future.